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‘They Say—What Say They? Let Them  
Say’\*†

BY THE MARCHIONESS OF ABERDEEN AND TEMAIR.

It is almost exactly thirty years ago when it was announced that Lord Aberdeen had been appointed Governor-General of Canada. He and I happened to be at Chicago at the time, superintending to the best of our ability the operations of the Irish village at the World's Fair, our splendid manager, Mr. Peter White, having died unexpectedly, and his gallant little widow having to settle up affairs in Ireland before she could take over his task, which she eventually did, with such signal success. Although we almost immediately left for home, in order to make preparation for settling in Canada during the autumn, yet the fact of our being in America at the time attracted a good deal of special attention to the new appointment, and during that summer and autumn we had occasion to read a good many interesting and amusing descriptions of ourselves and of our manner of life. But one such description stands out in our remembrance very vividly, for to it we trace the origin of a crop of stories which appear to have a perennial life.

The article in question occupied three or four long columns in a Boston Sunday newspaper, and went into great

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\*By kind permission of the Editor of “The Nineteenth Century and After,” and of the author.

† This well known saying is the English version of the motto of the Keith Marischal family, engraved over the inner entrance door of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and which runs as follows:—

“*Thay haif said. Quhat say they? Lat them say!*”

It is supposed to have been adopted as a motto by the Earl Marischal (who founded the College) in a defiant mood, when certain statements were being circulated to his discredit.

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detail regarding our supposed antecedents, our family, and our home, and provided us with much novel information. The people of Canada were warned that they would have to put up with a lady at Government House who had a bee in her bonnet with regard to the servant question, one who would never allow her servants to wear caps, and who was in the habit of playing hide-and-seek and other such games with the housemaids and footmen, at all sorts of odd hours of the day, and that therefore visitors might come and ring at the door fruitlessly, and, when ultimately admitted, might catch a glimpse of blind man's buff being engaged in by the butler and housekeeper and various members of the family. Moreover, it was stated as a fact that Lord Aberdeen and I dined habitually in the servants' hall on certain days of the week.

We showed this paper to Dr. de Witt Talmage, the well-known American preacher, who happened to be visiting us at Haddo House at the time, and asked his advice as to publishing a contradiction of these wild inventions. He said: 'Well, there are two ways of dealing with this: you can either *smite* it, by publishing a contradiction, or you may indicate your estimate of the value of the article by ignoring it altogether.' There was a pause, and then Lord Aberdeen said: 'And you consider that the second course would be the best?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'I do.'

We followed this advice, but we have often regretted that we did not take energetic action at the time, because we and our servants have been continually annoyed by these stories cropping up perpetually in various forms.

So persistent did they become that some years later Queen Victoria requested Lord Rosebery, who was then Prime Minister, to ascertain whether it was a fact that, whilst occupying the position of Governor-General, Lord Aberdeen, together with myself and members of our family and staff, dined in the servants' hall once a week. Of course, we gave our good friend Lord Rosebery the necessary information as to the strictly orthodox character of our household arrangements, whereby he was enabled to reassure Her Majesty on the subject.

But, as illustrating the persistence of the fabrication, it may be added that, soon after King Edward had ascended



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the throne, it was evidently repeated to His Majesty, for he too made inquiries on the subject, through a near relative who then held a Court appointment.

A story which had great vogue related how on one occasion, when we were dining with one of the great magnates of Canada at Montreal, I turned to the table-maid who was serving me, and said: 'Take off that cap, that badge of servitude; I cannot abide the sight of it.' And it was only the other day that an intimate friend of ours, who was staying at an Alpine resort, was solemnly told by another guest at the hotel that when visitors came to the Viceregal Lodge they were liable to be taken to dinner by the butler or housekeeper. Our friend, who had often been our guest in Ireland, had the greatest difficulty in persuading her companion that during her many visits to us in Ireland she had always seen all dinner-parties carried on in the most correct manner according to precedence, and under the Chamberlain's rigid directions.

Now what was the origin of these stories?

In the original article referred to, there were traces of confusion between three movements: (1) the Onward and Upward Association, originally started for the benefit of farm servant-girls on Lord Aberdeen's estates; (2) a Household Club for our own immediate employees; and (3) a 'Servants' Union' which was being formed, or attempted to be formed, in England about the same period, but with which we and our household had never the slightest connection.

The Onward and Upward Association was an endeavour to give the girls employed in farm-houses an occupation and recreation outside their daily work, and assistance in keeping up their education, and at the same time provide common interests between the mistresses and servants. It was started in 1882, in the days when bicycles were not yet in common use, when there were but very scanty opportunities for recreation and social intercourse in villages and rural districts, and very few guilds or organisations for girls. It worked by means of competitions in answering questions on Bible topics, history, geography, literature, domestic science, needlework, knitting, etc. There were examining committees in every district, who awarded marks, and all

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work reaching a certain percentage of marks, *gained* a prize or certificate. It does not sound very exciting, but the interest shown by the girls in trying to puzzle out answers to the questions and in reading the books prescribed was very marked, and the works of Shakespeare, Scott, and Dickens, Thackeray, etc., were favourite subjects of study; essays, too, were very popular, and some of the Bible questions, and needlework or knitting, were taken up by practically all members. University men, who were among the examiners, were wont to marvel at the excellence of the work produced, and to say, after watching the progress made by girls who stuck to the work year after year, that their papers equalled those of many University students. The certificates offered to girls remaining in the same place for a number of years, and for doing the questions for several years consecutively, have been often claimed for periods of over twenty years.

Of course, social gatherings were organised by the various branches, and in many ways mistresses and servants were drawn together.

The girls, too, who married, often wished to continue adding to their library by winning prizes in the competitions and so we eventually had a large number of married women connected with the Association, whose influence on their children's training and education has proved the value of the system.

With the advent of new conditions, and with the greater facility for attending classes and meetings, most of the branches of the Onward and Upward are now merged in, or replaced by Women's Rural Institutes or other organisations, such as the Girl Guides or Girls' Guildry. In so far as these newer movements apply to girls engaged in domestic service, there is an underlying principle common to all in the endeavour to supply wholesome interests and recreation outside the daily routine of duty, and to provide opportunities for bringing mistresses and servants into closer relations with each other in connection with matters having a similar common interest for both, which was a fundamental principle of the Onward and Upward Association.

The Household Club, which also must share the respon-



sibility for furnishing the material out of which those fancy stories to which I have alluded were woven, was really the outcome of an uneasy feeling on our part that whilst we were sharing in various philanthropic movements, and trying to bring ameliorating influences to bear on the lives and surroundings of the farm lassies, we were doing nothing in the same direction for the members of our own household, and the outside employees, and nothing to bring all into human relations with each other and ourselves, beyond our daily gathering in the Haddo House chapel for family worship day by day, and on Sunday evenings.

Those last-mentioned gatherings, always well attended, suggested that some further opportunities should be created, through which we might all know and understand one another better, and assist one another's development, and also thereby form channels of helpful influence through which our household might be an active factor for good in its relation with the community in which our lot was cast.

Accordingly a circular was drafted setting forth the idea that the relationship in which we and our family and employees stood to one another involved a responsibility for us all to try to be helpful to one another and to brighten one another's lives, and suggesting that the formation of a Haddo House Club, under the management of an annually elected committee, for the purpose of providing opportunities of education and recreation, might be of service to us all.

In December 1889, in response to this circular, a general meeting was held, to which all Haddo House employees, whether engaged in indoor or outdoor service, were invited, when Lord Aberdeen explained the idea and the objects of the proposed organisation. The establishment of the club was decided on unanimously, and all present came forward to enrol themselves as members. A constitution based on the circular, and a few simple rules were adopted, and honorary officers and a committee were elected by ballot. Lord Aberdeen was elected president, myself vice-president, and our under-butler secretary and treasurer. The committee, which was elected annually, was mainly composed of the heads of departments, both indoor and outdoor; for instance, the butler, the housekeeper, the



head gardener, the head coachman, the head forester, the gamekeeper, the estate clerk of works, the farm manager, the head laundrymaid, the poultry manager, etc.

The annual subscription was fixed at one shilling, entitling the member to attend all classes, social meetings and entertainments and allowing married members to bring their children under seventeen years of age free. It was also decided, with the consent of the heads of the household, that during the winter, from 6 to 7.15 every evening should be kept as free as possible for the operations of the Club.

Before a fortnight had passed we had a singing class of twenty members, led first by the precentor of a neighbouring parish church, and subsequently by our head forester; a carving class of twelve members, led by our governess; a drawing class of thirteen members, led by our butler, who had attained no mean proficiency as an artist; a sewing class, led by our nurse; and a home reading circle of twenty members, led by a neighbouring schoolmaster. This last was felt to be a very practical and useful part of the club's work. Points were raised and debates carried on by the readers on the subjects treated in the prescribed course. These classes prosecuted their work through the winter months, and may be regarded as having been successful in attaining their object, inasmuch as those attending them not only showed interest while they were proceeding but displayed a disposition during the subsequent summer months to keep up and develop the attainments acquired.

Social evenings, held either weekly or fortnightly, were a prominent and successful feature of the club from the beginning, and proved not only popular, but helpful. These entertainments were nearly all provided by home talent, and consisted chiefly of music, singing, reading, recitations and short lectures. The readiness of the members to take a personal part in the proceedings and to take trouble in preparing for them was very encouraging. From among the members a different chairman or chairwoman was chosen for each meeting, and all the members were asked to let the secretary know when they felt able to make any personal contribution to the entertainment of the club. One played a melodeon, another a concertina, another the piano or violin; many could sing or recite; others gave readings or

short lectures. The singing class gave valuable assistance with glees. It was surprising to find how much home talent there was. Thus all learned to co-operate, and there is no doubt but that the classes and social gatherings drew all the household very closely together.

Let me give the programmes of two social evenings, by way of illustration:

January 5th, 1890.

EARL OF ABERDEEN in the Chair.

Piano Duet	.. ..	Lady Marjorie Gordon and Miss Forssman	(our little daughter and her governess)
Part Song	.. ..	'Love at Home'	.. .. Singing Class
Lecture on	'Railways and Railway Work'	.. ..	Lord Aberdeen
Part Song..	.. ..	'Come to the Woodlands'	Ivy Cottage Children
			(some little orphan girls whom we were bringing up in a home near at hand)
Song	.. ..	'Will-o'-the-Wisp'	.. .. Mr. Turner
			(Lord Aberdeen's valet)
Recitation	.. ..	'Caught in His Own Trap'	Frederick Hurst
			(footman)
Part Song	.. ..	'The Woods'	.. .. Singing Class

March 6th, 1890.

MRS. ANDERSON (Housekeeper) in the Chair.

Musical Box.

Lecture	.. ..	'Phrenological Plea'	Mr. Gregory (house carpenter)
Duet	.. ..	'The Burial of the Linnet'	Dudley and Archie Gordon
			(our little sons, then five and six years old)
Piano	.. ..	.. ..	.. Miss Forrest (gardener's daughter)
Recitation	.. ..	'The Bridge-keeper's Story'	Edward Moseley
			(hall boy)
Song	.. ..	'The Runaway Musketeer'	Mr. Isherwood (poultry manager)
Reading	.. ..	'The Broken Crutch'	Mrs. Chevalier (head nurse)
Melodeon	.. ..	.. ..	John Keddie (groom)
Song	.. ..	'The Cows are in the Corn'	Mary Isherwood
			(poultry manager's daughter)
Duet	.. ..	'The Rowan Tree'	Mary Cook and Maggie Gall
			(two of the maidservants)
Recitation	.. ..	'Old Scissors'	.. .. Frederick Hurst (footman)
Harmonium and Concertina	.. ..	Mrs. Isherwood and Mr. Germain	
			(poultry manager's wife and under-butler)
Song	.. ..	'The Four Jolly Smiths'	Mr. Grant (butler)

Great as was the success of the first year, it was entirely eclipsed by the report given in at the second annual meeting. This report had to deal with educational classes, comprising composition, arithmetic, book-keeping, Shakespeare reading, wood-carving, drawing, singing, embroidery, shorthand, ambulance classes, the operation of an efficient



fire brigade, cricket club, football club, lawn tennis club (composed of girls), the working of garden allotments offered to members of the club, and an account of the various social meetings, picnics, expeditions, etc. These included some special lectures kindly given by guests staying in the house, such as 'Canada,' by Professor Bryce, M.P. (the late Viscount Bryce), and 'The Pacific Islands and Japan,' by Professor Henry Drummond; also the first attempts toward a debating society. Another new and important feature was the introduction of magic lantern lectures. The club also undertook to raise a coal fund for the poor of the neighbouring district by means of supplying lectures on contemporary history, illustrated by slides provided by the Magic Lantern Mission. This effort and a concert given by members of the club on behalf of the funds of a public library in another district showed that the desire was growing to extend its advantages to others. During our temporary absences from home the club showed its ability to stand alone, and proved of immense value in forming a centre round which those in our employment about Haddo House rallied while we were away, and also in keeping up a definite link between them and ourselves and the other members of our household who accompanied us across the Atlantic. For at Ottawa a Government House branch of our club was formed, with our butler as secretary, and as far as possible it was carried out on the same lines. Weekly social meetings, such as I have already described, generally including a lecture given us by some kind friend at Ottawa, were the leading features, and in this manner we have been given some most valuable instruction in a very pleasant way.

There were also a French class, a singing class, a drawing class, and a large working party, the members of which decided to make garments suitable for poor emigrants arriving in Canada without proper clothing; and whilst the others worked I undertook to give a *resumé* of the history of the world each week as gathered from the newspapers. It is not likely that at Ottawa outdoor recreation would be forgotten, and we had our skating, cricketing, lawn tennis, and boating sections, in which the members of the club took full part during their leisure hours.

Mutual reports between the Haddo House Club and the Government House Club were sent at frequent intervals, and were looked for eagerly, and the tie thus kept up was of a very healthful character. One of the special efforts of the club at home was the weekly Sunday evening service in the big hall attached to the house, which they carried out in a most happy and helpful spirit, and through which they maintained our practice of holding Sunday evening services in our private chapel in which the ministers of all the various denominations in our neighbourhood took part in turn.

The same sort of service was carried on in the Government House chapel at Ottawa, and at the chapel at the Viceregal Lodge, Dublin, and thus those at home and those who were absent were always drawn together in spirit in the truest and most sacred bonds of association and fellowship, as we remembered one another gathered together for worship at the same hour every Sunday evening.

After a dozen years of vigorous life it was found that the number of classes, lectures, dances and other opportunities for recreation had increased so much in the neighbouring villages and the use of the bicycle had rendered attendance at those so easy that the club classes were no longer required and were discontinued, the social evening still being maintained.

A club such as ours could only be carried out fully in a large household; and a big country house, the centre of an estate, and having extensive grounds demanding the employment of many outdoor servants, furnishes the best possible field for an experiment such as ours. We were peculiarly fortunate in our head servants, for as heads of departments they all heartily threw themselves into the movement. Much in these cases must always depend on the persons occupying the positions of foremen. Without their help one can do but little. But while admitting this I must also assert the opinion that the principle underlying the operations of such a club as ours can be introduced into much smaller households, or a number of households can combine together to carry it out, as has been done with so much success by the 'Neighbourhood' Guilds, initiated by Dr. Stanley Coit in New York and London, and by the splendid Community Recreation Movement now being



carried out in many centres in the United States of America and also in this country by Village Clubs.

If the residents in a district, or a number of small households in suburban areas, would group themselves together for such community service, providing a general room where social gatherings of various kinds could be held, would that not in itself greatly brighten the lives of the members of those households? The fact of holding social gatherings, when songs and recitations and glees are welcome, gives an incentive to forget to gossip, and instead, to look up the reading, and practise the song or the piece of music, and makes people feel that they are wanted, and that they have a contribution to give to the community in which they live, which is valued. That is largely the secret of the success of the Women's Rural Institutes, but there is no reason why the same plan should not be adopted by all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in general, as is urged by the Village Clubs Movement.

What I have said explains perhaps the stories to which I have alluded, and which have been a source of both amusement and annoyance to our friends.

Such annoyance has been well worth enduring when we remember the social advantages we received through the medium of our club and how truly it increased that sense of understanding and mutual respect and regard which means so much when it exists between the members of a household which must of necessity be of so close a character when living under the same roof.

Our home, whether at Haddo House, or at Ottawa, or the Viceregal Lodge, Dublin, has been a very busy one, for there were always many visitors coming and going and much entertaining, both of an official character and also in connection with various organisations, and which meant much careful planning, much attention and preparation, and a great deal of hard work and extra hours. If the members of our establishment, and not only the heads of the departments, but those of all grades, had not thrown themselves heart and soul into carrying out these entertainments so as to make them as pleasant as possible to the guests, we could never have achieved our purpose. We always had the consciousness that our servants were just as keen as ourselves in

making the various functions as successful as possible, whether those concerned parties of school-children, or His Majesty's Ministers, or Their Majesties themselves.

Ladies who are hostesses know how much organisation and thought is required to make an entertainment a success, and the larger the entertainment and the larger the staff, the more thought and trouble does it require, and the more necessity is there for all to work heartily together. Indeed, I have always found the most intelligent co-operation among our household whenever and wherever there has been any special occasion for it, as well as when things have been moving along smoothly and regularly.

Of one thing I am very sure, and that is that the existence of our Household Club in no way tended to deteriorate the service rendered either to ourselves or to our guests, nor did it interfere with the discipline which must exist in every well-ordered household. But it did introduce the element of deep, mutual regard and understanding and sympathy for one another's lives, and a basis on which to build a common fellowship for all true and noble purposes, which should surely be the outcome of every Christian home and the aim and desire of every thoughtful householder.



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## "By My Spirit."\*

BY THE REV. F. LEWIS.

*Ps. 149. 6. 7.—Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,  
and a two-edged sword in their hand;*

*To execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishments  
upon the people.*

*Zechariah IV. 6.pt.—This is the word of the Lord unto  
Zerubbabel, saying, not by might, nor by power, but by  
My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*

SOME scholars have thought that the 149th Psalm belongs to the time of the Maccabees. That was a period when the Jews were fighting for their lives and their national existence against the tyranny of the Kings of Syria, especially of Antiochus Epiphanes. One of the objects of that tyranny had been to force a Hellenic civilization upon Palestine. The Hebrew scriptures had been sought out for destruction, and the altar of the Temple at Jerusalem had been desecrated by the sacrifice of a swine upon it. Every effort had been made to destroy by force the national spirit of the Jews. But no force can quell the stubborn hearts of men. The national spirit only burned the more fiercely and, in spite of disastrous defeats, carried the Jews to eventual success.

This Psalm, then, is supposed by some to have been composed for the feast of the Dedication of the Temple when the services were restored and reparation was made for the desecration of the holy place. But though there is much in the Psalm which fits in with such circumstances, yet there are other points which make against it. There are more points in favour of an earlier date for the Psalm. We are carried back to the days of Nehemiah. That period again is a period of restoration. You know how distressed

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\*A Sermon preached in Grasmere Church on the Ninth Sunday after Trinity.



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1 letter from Lady Aberdeen

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Lady Aberdeen's first visited the H.E.S.

See also obituary notice

P.R. Vol 50 pp 285, 357

Feb 1: 1928

Lady Aberdeen speeches  
1936 + 1938

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